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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 MEXICO 000509

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [MX](#)

SUBJECT: MEXICO LOOKS TO COLOMBIA AS SECURITY, REGIONAL  
PARTNER

REF: BOGOTA 00335

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Charles V. Barclay.  
Reason: 1.4 (b), (d).

11. (C) Summary. Mexico's increased outreach to Colombia is driven by a number of factors, principally by both countries' shared security struggles. Mexico's outreach to its South American neighbor probably also is part of a desire to increase its influence in the hemisphere and cultivate Latin American ties. Colombia is increasingly engaged with Mexico on security issues and is working with its northern counterpart on issues across the security spectrum, including offering a variety of classes and seminars based on its own experiences with organized crime and narcotrafficking. Despite what appears to be an effort to expand ties, there are some kinks in the relationship. Mexico is quick to remind observers that the bilateral relationship is being conducted between equals. Colombia is also bothered by Mexico's slow progress on security reforms and anti-corruption efforts, as well as GOM reticence to appropriately combat the FARC operating in the country. Nevertheless, shared interests and personal presidential affinities probably will continue to strengthen bonds between the governments. Embassy Mexico City offers its take on the bilateral relationship in response to Embassy Bogota's thoughtful cable on the issue (reftel). End Summary.

Mexico Seeks a Useful Partner  
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12. (C) Mexico's increased outreach to Colombia is driven by a number of factors, principally by both countries' similar security struggles. According to the Director of South American Affairs at Mexico's Secretary of Foreign Relations, Rafael Bernal Cuevas, Mexico believes it can learn from Colombia, and the entwined narcotics industries of both countries in fact necessitates closer cooperation. The two countries are attempting, for example, to develop mechanisms that would formalize and better track the various kinds of training, exchanges, and conferences in which they are engaged so as to better manage and institutionalize the relationship. Bernal also pointed to the January summit in Panama, attended by President Calderon, Colombian President Alvaro Uribe, Guatemalan President Alvaro Colom, and Panamanian President Martin Torrijos as a signal of deeper bilateral and multilateral cooperation to come. He told Poloff on February 18 that the four leaders discussed uniting against organized crime and narcotrafficking, and noted that

the leaders began discussion of implementing and developing various processes and mechanisms so as to improve information sharing and communication between the partners.

13. (C) In addition to security matters, Mexico's outreach to its South American neighbor probably also is part of a desire to increase its influence in the hemisphere and cultivate Latin American ties. Bernal told Poloff that other countries in the region--particularly Brazil--are too quick to label Mexico as North American, thus disputing Mexico's "Hispanic character." Bernal was quick to point out that Mexico indeed privileges its ties to the United States, but also is eager to prove and hone its Latin American identity. While Bernal claimed that Mexico recognizes Brazil's preeminence in the Southern Cone region and even South America more broadly, Mexico is looking to expand its role in Central American and neighboring environs. Building a stronger relationship with Colombia may be one way in which Mexico hopes to have a longer, stronger reach into the southern continent.

#### Colombia's Take: A Mexico City Perspective

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14. (C) Colombia is increasingly engaged with Mexico on security issues and is working with its northern counterpart on issues across the security spectrum. Colombian Political Officer Paola Holguin highlighted the number of recent high-level meetings between Colombian and Mexican officials (reftel) as confirmation of abundant interest in an expansion of relations. Colombia also is conducting a number of

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exchanges, training classes, and conferences on such topics as anti-kidnapping, human rights, police reform, asset forfeiture, and penal reforms. For example, Colombia offered its own experience with police reform to Mexico, including recruitment, vetting processes, training, the creation of special forces, and turning police work into a true career service, in hopes that Mexico would extract useful points for its own process toward transforming police forces. Colombia has worked not only with Mexico at the federal level, but also directly with states--such as Mexico State, Tabasco, and Nuevo Leon--that have requested assistance. Bogota has conducted anti-kidnapping courses with the Federal Police and are bringing Mexican justice officials to Colombia to learn more about its own asset forfeiture process, on which Mexico's own law, currently pending in Congress, is closely based.

15. (C) Holguin characterized the Mexico-Colombia relationship as deepening, mostly because of shared security concerns and Colombia's ability to assist its northern neighbor, but also because of "chemistry" between President Calderon and President Uribe. Holguin, who has been involved in the planning of and the actual meetings between the two leaders, noted that they seem to share similar characteristics and that they simply seemed to personally like each other. Calderon may, in fact, be planning a trip to Colombia within the next three months.

#### Some Kinks to Work Out

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16. (C) Despite what appears to be an effort to expand the relationship, Mexico is quick to remind observers that the bilateral relationship is being conducted between equals. Bernal told Poloff that Colombia also can learn from Mexico's experiences--it is not a one-way street. Perhaps reflecting Mexico's prickliness, Holguin complained to Poloff that Mexico is not good at giving credit where credit is due. Colombia, she said, is respectful of Mexico in this regard, but that some public expressions of thanks for Bogota's help would be appreciated.

17. (C) Colombia is also bothered by Mexico's slow progress on

security reforms and anti-corruption efforts. Holguin grumbled that political games being played by Mexico's political parties have hindered movement on police reform and that even if reorganization measures do pass, they will not be as sweeping as necessary. She also noted that the eight year implementation timeline of judicial overhaul probably is too long. Perhaps a more immediate impediment to significantly deepening cooperation, however, is Colombia's continued concern about Mexico's struggle with corruption (see reftel). Bogota has been asking to little avail the Mexican Attorney General's Office (PGR) for months to create more established and trustworthy vetting mechanisms to apply to officers selected to go receive training from Colombia. After feeling burned by the November arrest of senior Mexican police official Ricardo Gutierrez Vargas, head of Interpol's Mexico City bureau and interlocutor with the Colombian government, Colombia continues to press hard on this point and has yet to be satisfied.

18. (S) Finally, Colombia has yet to be satisfied by Mexico's treatment of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), which Mexico does not recognize as a terrorist group.

Holguin said that they have convinced the Calderon government to target FARC affiliates involved in narcotics trafficking, but that they have been unable to pressure the GOM into going after political and ideological operatives in the country. FARC sympathizers continue to operate openly out of the National Autonomous University of Mexico's Department of Philosophy, from which hailed the Mexican university student Lucia Morett, who survived the bombing of FARC leader Raul Reyes' Ecuadorian camp last year. Holguin claimed that the political operatives are not exclusively involved in propaganda or fundraising in Mexico, but instead are responsible for arranging the explosives training in Colombia for members of Mexico's Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR) that allowed them to carry out the pipeline attacks in 2007. (Note: We have not been able to corroborate or

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disprove this claim.)

Comment

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19. (C) Shared interests and personal presidential affinities have driven Mexico and Colombia to look for ways to expand their relationship, particularly in the security realm, and probably will continue to strengthen bonds between the governments. As noted by Embassy Bogota in reftel, both countries will have to look for ways to institutionalize the growing ties in order for them to continue after both Calderon and Uribe have left office. Mexico will also need to show returns on Colombian investment, as well as proof that it is truly cracking down on corruption, in order for the growing ties to continue apace.

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